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Engendering a Professional Woman Playwright: Aphra Behn's Adaptation Strategies

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I

The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 brought about great changes to the theatrical situation in London. After the interregnum shutdown of the theatres, Thomas Killigrew (1612-83) and Sir William D'Avenant (1606-68) were given licenses to set up respectively the King's Company and the Duke of York's Company and to reopen the theatres with newly devised equipment or structures.¹ In addition, new theatres in London saw various innovations, such as the appearance of a professional woman playwright or of powerful female patronage. These alterations are sometimes thought to have been caused by the break in the tradition of English drama resulting from the puritans' strictures on the stage. However, the Restoration stage could not maintain its vitality even to the end of the century, as the eighteenth century has been viewed as an age of the novel.² Therefore, we usually have the impression that Restoration plays are unique, that is, they are quite different from the plays before and after that period. But is this a fair idea of Restoration drama?

In reconsidering the specificity of Restoration drama, Aphra Behn and her plays can usefully be examined, because she offers us illustrative cases for making clear this problem in the levels of dramatic text and theatrical system.³ Aphra Behn is now widely esteemed as the first professional woman playwright in England, but this recognition was controversial in her own time. Gerard Langbaine, her contemporary, describes "Aphra Behn" in his *An Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691) as follows:

A Person lately deceased, but whose Memory will be long fresh amongst the Lovers of Dramatick Poetry, as having been suffi-

ciently Eminent not only for her Theatrical Performances, but several other Pieces both in Verse and Prose; which gain'd her an Esteem among the Wits Most of her Comedies have had the good fortune to please: and tho' it must be confest that she has borrow'd very much, not only from her own Country Men, but likewise from the French Poets: yet it may be said on her behalf, that she has often been forc'd to it through hast: and has borrow'd from others Stores, rather of Choice than for want of a fond of Wit of her own: it having been formerly her unhappiness to be necessitated to write for Bread, as she has publisht to the world. 'Tis also to her Commendation, that whatever she borrows she improves for the better. . . .

(Langbaine, pp. 17-18)

Langbaine admires, to some extent, her achievement as a writer “not only for her Theatrical Performances, but several other Pieces both in Verse and Prose,” yet also points out that her creative activity is indebted to various English and French dramatists. Though it is important not to miss his evaluation of her improvement of the plays, we should also note his assuming that she needed to “write for Bread” and “borrow'd from others Stores.”

The theatre was much swayed by the social situations of the day, and the Restoration stage was frequently affected by power politics in court, at parliament or in the market. This made Behn, who had to live on her writing, sensitive to the time's political tides. Nevertheless, she did not avoid dealing with such social or political matters, but treated these delicate themes, usually by strategically adapting what are called political plays. In this paper, I will reconsider the uniqueness of the Restoration theatrical world, by examining the first professional woman playwright and her ways of adapting earlier English plays. Compared with these works, it will be clear how she made good use of the masculine culture of English drama, and how she could gain the status of a professional writer in such a theatrical tradition.

II

To see how Aphra Behn became a profit-making playwright, we must first examine her greatest hit, *The Rover*, and its original, Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso, or The Wanderer*. *The Rover* was so popular as to be repeatedly performed over a long period.⁴ *Thomaso*, on the other hand, has no record of performance, though some plans seem to have been made to put it on in the 1660s. Proclaimed as a two-part work, the play is actually composed of ten acts, incoherently sequenced,

which give the impression of a diffuse design unfit for performance. Probably written at the time of Killigrew's exile in Madrid from 1654 to 1655, the play is thought to be to some extent autobiographical.⁵ Behn, surely with Killigrew's consent, adapted *Thomaso* in 1677, seven years after her debut, when he, with royal support, was a man of power in the theatrical world. Though Behn and Killigrew had probably known each other for some time, she started her career with the Duke's Company, Killigrew's rival.⁶ As we do not know how their relationship affected Behn's production of *The Rover*, we will contrast it in detail with its original to disclose her methods of adaptation. First, let us see how Killigrew characterizes and presents his autobiographical hero.

Thomaso is set in Madrid, to which the banished cavalier Thomaso has come, pursuing his beloved Serulina. Fleeing from England, Thomaso, with financial problems, is distressed by the fact that Serulina is the daughter of a wealthy family. This poor knight is so proud that he cannot court her for fear of being suspected of loving her only for her fortune. Meanwhile, he leads a corrupted life, keeping company with whores and making fun of them. Finding himself in desperate straits, these whores plan to revenge themselves upon him, but in the end he is rescued from their schemes. As a result, he swears his love for Serulina by promising to be truly penitent. Until his joyful announcement that the hardships in love come to an end thanks to his love for Serulina, Thomaso has been a wanderer, one so destitute as to accept money from Angelica Bianca, a courtesan who loves him.⁷ The exiled cavaliers spend depraved and wandering lives with the prostitutes, which lead to inconceivable happenings, as in the following scene, where he blames his drunken friends, Ferdinand and Edwardo, for their attempt to rape Serulina:

Thom. Do you know this lady? — nor you, *Edwardo*?

Ferd. I have seen that face, but where I cannot call to mind.

Edw. Nor I; yet there are dark lines in my memory that lead me to her face; 'tis not *Lucetta* I am certain.

Thom. I shall remove this wonder with another; have you never heard me mention the name of *Serulina*. Horrid beasts! are you not both struck with the judgement of this vision? — Do's not your black breasts accuse you of all the villany most barbarous men can be guilty of? what misery can this oppress'd innocence inflict, that your own souls will not say you ought to suffer? what mercy can you hope from this provok'd virtue, whose barbarous breasts, even forgetting her sex, could proceed to

threaten blows, which she could have suffer'd too with less
affliction then those wounds your rage and lust impos'd?

(*The Second Part of Thomaso*, p.417. III. iv)

Thomaso severely laments their unjust and inhuman act, and their frightening the innocent Serulina, and he cannot believe that they are not “struck with the judgment of this vision”; in sum, they cannot distinguish a lady from a courtesan. Edwardo is represented as so stupid a fellow as to revenge himself on the whore by slashing her face with a knife, only because he has been tricked out of his money and goods. We can say, however, that it is a convention to mistake ladies for courtesans in comedies. Ferdinand and Edwardo, in a sense, function properly in a comic plot, but, in this writing of Killigrew's, more noteworthy is the fact that Thomaso alone will not make this mistake. He is the one character with a unique and privileged status; that is to say, for women, he is a lover whose love they wish for, and for men, he is a hero they really admire. Therefore, having indulged in dissipation with his friends, he is happily settled at the end. When all the stratagems and intentions of the plots converge for the final reconciliation, Thomaso relates that “our Loves has crown'd,” for the “Virtue of this Star, bright *Serulina*, whose Friendship thus has fixt the Wanderer” and now “all Fears and Tyranny of the Boy must be remembred onely as the salt and seasoning of this Joy” (*The Second Part of Thomaso*, p.464. V. x).

As the comic mistaken identities of women and the happy conclusion show, the hero of *Thomaso* is presented as an exceptional character. In considering how this character is received or adapted by Behn, we will now examine the hero of *The Rover*, what ending he comes to, and how the motif of mistaking a friend's love for a prostitute appears in the plot. In rewriting the play, she creatively selects, adds to, and improves the characters or plots, and a story is concocted in which some of the women can devise strategies for controlling their own marriages.⁸ When we consider her alteration of the same mistake motif as in *Thomaso*, we can find Killigrew's hero greatly transformed into the rake, Willmore, a fashionable figure on the 1670s' stage:

WILLMORE Whe how the Devil shou'd I know *Florinda*?

BELVILE Ah plague of your Ignorance! if it had not been
Florinda, must you be a Beast? — a Brute? a Senseless Swine.

WILLMORE Well Sir, you see I am endu'd with patience — I
can bear — tho Egad y'are very free with me, methinks. — I
was in good hopes the Quarrel wou'd have been on my side, for

so uncivilly interrupting me.
 BELVILE Peace Brute! whilst thou'rt safe — oh I'm distracted.
 WILLMORE Nay, nay, I'm an unlucky Dogg, that's certain.
 BELVILE Ah Curse upon the Star that Rul'd my Birth! or what-soever other Influence that makes me still so wretched.
 WILLMORE Thou break'st my Heart with these complaints; there is no Star in fault, no Influence, but Sack, the cursed Sack I drunk.
 FREDERICK Whe how the Devil came you so drunk?
 WILLMORE Whe how the Devil came you so sober?

(*The Rover*, III. ii. 197-210)

The situation is almost the same; a man blames his friend for attempting to rape his beloved. But, here, Willmore, the hero of the play, is not blaming but blamed by his friends, because he, mistaking Belvile's love, Florinda, for a whore, nearly ravishes her. Willmore not only talks disgracefully about his drunkenness, but he is also called a "Beast." With regard to the conventional motif in Restoration comedies of trying to rape a woman by mistake, what is noteworthy here is that the characters take extremely different positions in *Thomaso* and *The Rover*. Willmore is, far from the privileged character of *Thomaso*, portrayed in accordance with Edwardo, a fool called "beast[s]" by *Thomaso*. While, in the original, the hero blames and severely laments over his friends' stupid conduct, the hero in the adaptation deserves to be censured, disparaged or even called "a senseless Swine." Why does Behn present her hero quite differently from its proto-character? To conform the points of her design, let us also consider how Blunt, Edwardo's equivalent, is described in *The Rover*.

Blunt is certainly another Edwardo, as he, having been fooled out of his money and goods by a whore, decides to revenge himself on every one of them. While he is making a firm resolution, Florinda suddenly comes into his house seeking refuge from pursuit by her brother, a paternal figure trying to force her into an arranged marriage. To Florinda who appears "by a strange unlucky accident, to seek a safety," Blunt, pulling her rudely, replies that he "will be reveng'd on one Whore for the sins of another" (*The Rover*, IV. i. 593-615). Blunt is pleased that he could have an immediate chance of vengeance, since he is convinced that Florinda is a whore. In the original play, the hero is distinctly different from the other male characters, and especially from the gull. In *The Rover*, by contrast, the distinction between the hero and the foolish figure is extremely blurred, as both Willmore and Blunt not only fail to tell a noblewoman from a courtesan but try to

rape the same lady, Florinda. Moreover, Willmore is such a mercenary person that, as soon as he knows of her fortune, he tries to marry the heroine, forgetting his previous declaration of aversion to the marriage system. In this way, he is relegated to a kind of gull who has no privileged qualities and does not behave rationally.

The play ends with three marriages, including his own with the heiress. This conclusion, however, cannot suggest a happy-ever-after like *Thomaso's*, because Willmore, having discarded a courtesan, almost has his consent to marriage arranged by the heroine. Killigrew's autobiographical hero is represented as a character in an exclusive and privileged position, distinguished from other characters, which implies that his *Thomaso* possesses the disposition of the elite Royalist with a predominant male sexuality. The image of *Thomaso* in the last scene where he stops wandering to be happy with the virtuous Serulina recalls that of the Royalists, who were restored to power by reversing their expatriation. Aphra Behn, on the other hand, dramatizes the elite Royalist and his predominant male sexuality in a comical or ludicrous way, where her hero has no privileged nature but bears a striking resemblance to the gull, and nor does he take the initiative in love triangle and marriage. Behn, using Killigrew's *Thomaso* originally written from the Royalist standpoint, strips the hero of his unique or privileged quality in social or sexual respects. Furthermore, she again used *Thomaso* for *The Second Part of the Rover* in 1681, in which the rover is once more involved in a love triangle, but, this time, he decides to live together with a courtesan without getting married in the end. As this last scene clearly shows, where the marriage system might be questioned, Behn presents a variety of gender relationships rather than political problems. While weakening political viewpoints or awarenesses, she extracts from the original the bright European culture of witty or charming girls, and gorgeous courtesans.

III

The comedy adapted by Aphra Behn from an original play with political meanings turned out to be her most successful play. At the time *The Rovers* were acted, English political alliances were shifting from France to Holland. The situation parallels that of *Thomaso's* creation, that is, social or political uncertainty was producing a threatening atmosphere, when Charles in exile approached Spain rather than France.⁹ Within the country, the problem of succession to the throne

became increasingly a matter of grave concern: James, Duke of York, left England, escaped from danger, even though the second Exclusion Bill was rejected with the dissolution of Parliament and the disapproval of the House of Lords. Charles, after dissolving Parliament in 1681, newly convened another one, but soon dissolved it when the third Exclusion Bill was put on the agenda, and parliament was never again summoned until the king's death. From the later 1670s to the early 1680s, the conflict for power between king and parliament appeared to be repeating the situation of the Civil War. When *The Second Part of the Rover* was played, it was one of the only two comedies acted in the 1680-81 season. The play was well received by the audiences. At time when some plays were prohibited from being performed because of their usurpation themes, it was dedicated to the Duke of York, a central figure in the Exclusion Crisis.¹⁰

She, as her dedication suggests, was never indifferent to social or political issues, though she weakened such matter in her adaptations. On this point, consideration of another adaptation by Behn will be useful to see how she strategically produces the plays for the stage. After *The Second Part of the Rover*, she made adaptations in succession in 1681-82. One of them, *The Roundheads, or The Good Old Cause* is based on a work written during the Commonwealth, and usually considered as a political play performed when a politically disquieting atmosphere prevailed. When publishing this play in 1682, she warned Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, in the Epistle Dedicatory to "beware of false Ambition," alluding to his half brother, the Duke of Monmouth, who was threatening royal stability (Epistle Dedicatory, 102).¹¹

The Roundheads is adapted from *The Rump, or The Mirrour of The late Times* brought out around 1659/60 by John Tatham, who, as a writer, experienced extremely complicated transitions in the times when steps were diversely taken against the theatres. He opened his career in 1632 with a play that favored the court, probably from ambition for patronage. With the Civil War's breaking out, his works were not performed or published during the 1640s. His second play, which is a tragicomedy where royal blood is finally restored after repetitive usurpations, appeared as a publication in 1651 and there is no record of performance. At the same time, he also published an anti-Scottish play, and, afterwards, came to be engaged in producing the Lord Mayer's Show. By producing the show, he tried to fashion a new English nation and to play an intermediate part between parliament and city. *The Rump* was his last play created in 1659/60, after which his name

disappeared from the stage, though he continued to write civic shows until 1664. John Tatham, as his career shows, writes in various positions with regard to the court, parliament and the city.

The title page of *The Rump* says the play was "Acted Many Times with Great Applause, At the Private House in Dorset-Court." In this play, real members of parliament in 1659-60 are presented as characters with some changes to their names, for example, Bertlam from Lambert. The author could not be completely sure of his security at the time of writing, because he describes the Rump disparagingly or ridiculously, and its members and their wives stupidly or wretchedly. As well as the Rumpers' foolishness, a sharp criticism toward women's unsoundness is invited not only by Mrs. Cromwell but Lady Bertlam. Lady Bertlam is presented as being as ambitious as her husband, who secretly aspires to take Cromwell's place. Her arrogance makes her preside over the women's "Common-Wealth" and forces her woman to call herself "highness." The women's congress was a target of frequent attacks in the 1650s, but Lady Bertlam's is pictured on the stage in such a ridiculous way that women there are complaining about their husbands or walking companions.¹² When proposals are made like "the Cavaliers may not be lookt upon as Monsters, for they are Men," she goes to the Parliament House to "have um confirm'd" (*The Rump*, pp. 27-28. II. i.), only to be refused to entry to the House and called by her husband "a Mad Woman" (*The Rump*, p. 35. III. i.). At a time when confusion or struggle for power within the Rump became more serious, the Rumpers' wives proposed that they should improve cordial relations with men [the Cavaliers] with a sexual connotation, but the proposal results in refusal by their husbands [the Rump]. Though *The Rump* portrays the characters and their relations ridiculously and cynically, matters of Rump versus Cavaliers, or republicanism versus monarchy are definitely brought into question. In the play, to say nothing of the Rumpers themselves, the women come to a wretched end, as they are relegated to street vendor, whore or mad woman. Tatham indicates his public standpoint by markedly debasing the characters on the side of the Rump or republicanism.

Adapting this clearly political play, Aphra Behn wrote *The Roundheads* with new characters and plots added. The play ridiculing the Roundheads made a certain profit in performance in 1681/82. Behn does not use the changed names of the original characters but the real ones, and, more than anything else, she devises new characters; two Cavaliers [Loveless and Freeman] and a wife for the Roundhead

[Lady Desbro]. New plots make the “adaptation” extremely dissimilar from the original, where strategies for love are developed between Loveless and Lady Lambert, and between Freeman and Lady Desbro who promises to marry Freeman when her husband dies. Behn produces love stories between the Cavaliers and the wives of the leading Roundheads figures. As an example, let us look at the motif of the women’s congress presented by Behn in quiet different settings from Tatham’s, where the ladies’ proposal is made by Loveless disguised as a woman. The scene is moved to the end of the play as a climax, and changed into the incident that unites Lady Lambert and Loveless in sincere love:

LADY LAMBERT Alas, I do not merit thy Respect,
 I’m fall’n to Scorn, to Pity and Contempt. *Weeping*
 Ah *Loveless*, fly the Wretched —
 Thy Vertue is too noble to be shin’d on
 By any thing but rising Suns alone:
 I’m a declining shade. —

LOVELESS By Heaven, you were never great till now!
 I never thought thee so much worth my Love,
 My knee, and Adoration, till this Minute. *Kneels*
 — I come to offer you my Life, and all,
 The little Fortune the rude Herd has left me.

LADY LAMBERT Is there such god-like Vertue in your Sex?
 Or rather, in your Party.
 Curse on the Lies and Cheats of Conventicles,
 That taught me first to think Heroicks Devils,
 Blood-thirsty, lewd, tyrannick Savage Monsters.
 — But I believe ’em Angels all, if all like *Loveless*.
 What heavenly thing then must the Master be,
 Whose Servants are Divine?

(*The Roundheads*, V. i. 368-86)

As becomes a climax, the scene foregrounds the joyful relationship of lovers, in that Loveless declares his love to Lady Lambert, offering his “Life, and all,” by which she is moved. She was taught at first to think his sex or his Party “Heroicks Devils, / Blood-thirsty, lewd, tyrannick Savage Monsters,” but changes her view, as there is “such god-like Vertue” in them, meaning not only men but also the Cavaliers. Indeed, Tatham’s Lady Bertlam also proposes to form friendships with the Cavaliers, but she is scornfully excluded and not saved in the end. By contrast, Lady Lambert is given an ending quite unlike the original; having been informed of her husband’s downfall, she is rescued by Loveless from the mob rushing to the congress. While the original

scene presents political matters in a critical light, as if poetic justice could be done by excluding obstacles from future harmony, the altered scene advances love stories between puritan women and the cavaliers.

What is important here is that Aphra Behn uses the women's congress to transform political problems into gender issues, convenient, of course, for putting on stage many actresses. This is not simply because obvious antipathies in power relations should not be presented on the stage during times of national crisis. Political struggle plots were not only fit for adaptation into lovers' conflicts, but attractive enough to draw the audience to the theatre by making them wonder what design would be developed from those delicate matters. Then, the audience witnesses the brilliant stage on which actresses play witty and attractive women engaging in love plots. The play appears undoubtedly to convey a political message behind the scenes, as the final union of lovers suggests the possibility of reconciliation between the rival parties, but, nevertheless, highlights love and gender afflictions or pleasures.

IV

As we have seen in the previous sections, *The Rovers* and *The Roundheads* are love comedies, adapted from 1650s' plays. Adaptation is safe, in a sense, to perform, when the popularity of the original work can be a promise of success, like Shakespeare's. However, we cannot say that the original plays we have discussed here could guarantee success in performance, because *Thomaso* might not have been staged, and *The Rump*'s popularity must have been transitory when the London citizens were enjoying the fall of tyrannical rulers. Then, what made Behn rewrite these Royalists' plays into love comedies in which courtesans and wives are presented as in love?

Aphra Behn, though so popular a writer during the Restoration period, had difficulty in drawing a large audience to her plays and consequently gaining earnings. In those days, when performing a play produced a great success, fair box-office proceeds would come into the company's possession. By contrast, playwrights could acquire only a part of the profits, partly because they, in performing their dramatic works, had to pay a registration fee or entertainment expenses for the actors and other theatrical staff, and mainly because it was only from the third night of performance that they received money, with various costs subtracted. Furthermore, two companies were in such

hard straits that they could not be run independently and united in 1682, which made the theatrical circumstances even more difficult, economically speaking.¹³ Then not only playwrights but the companies themselves were obliged to achieve a great success in producing a play, or secure the patronage of courtiers or wealthy citizens, comprising the greater part of the audience. For that purpose, they could not but feel the necessity of being sensitive to the responses of the audience and indulging their tastes.

However, from the late 1670s to the early 1680s, such triangular balances as Anglican, Catholic, and Protestant in religion, or King, Parliament, and City in power began to collapse. When the theatre could hardly find generous patrons, the playwrights' primary consideration would have to be how their works would win popularity with an audience. At this critical time, Behn changed a play that ridicules enthusiastic characters in the civil strife into a comedy in which fashionable lovers lightly devise tricks or strategies in their love games. In this regard, *The Rovers* and *The Roundheads* reveal a playwright's strategic adaptation to her times in attempting to replace political strife with gender conflict. Behn's gender conflict is distinctively represented in such characters as a courtesan distressed by her passionate and genuine desire for love, or a wife in anguish over her own marriage and a girl over her arranged marriage. This strategy, as well as utilizing the original antagonism in political conflict for lovers' struggles, is simultaneously useful in performance, for it would enable many actresses to appear on the stage, offering visual pleasure to the audience. Therefore, her planned rewriting will have been a quite effective way to make the play more marketable in both the form and content of the work.

In addition to her designs on the stage, Behn published her play soon after its first performance, as was often the case at that time, because publishing new plays was recognized as a way of making money for both playwrights and publishers since the 1670s.¹⁴ Consequently, even if the performances ended in failure, some of their scripts would be reprinted later, so the playwrights would justify or reevaluate their own plays or unsuccessful performances from the standpoint of the writer. Such a new trend promoted by Restoration publishers was to encourage playwrights to realize their own status as writers in the ownership of their creations. Behn must have been one of the dramatists who were conscious of authorship, as she struggled desperately to be approved as a writer, not an adapter, much less a pla-

giarist.

As a woman playwright, she must feel acutely that she cannot be free from prejudice that labels her as an unintelligent plagiarist. For example, Gerard Langbaine comments on her successful comedies as follows:

Rover, or The Banisht Cavaleers, in Two parts, both of them Comedies, Acted at the Duke's Theatre, and printed in quarto, Lond. 1677, and 1681. the Second Part being Dedicated to his Royal Highness the Duke. These are the only Comedies, for the Theft of which, I condemn this ingenious Authoress; they being so excellent in their Original, that 'tis pity they should have been alter'd: and notwithstanding her Apology in the Postscript to the first part; I cannot acquit her of prevarication, since *Angelica* is not *the only stol'n Object*, as she calls it: she having borrow'd largely throughout. The truth is, the better to disguise her Theft . . . and therefore could not justly call these Plays her own.

(Langbaine, pp. 20-21)

Langbaine is enthusiastic in finding out who or what works affect the play he is discussing; he points out "*Angelica* is not *the only stol'n Object*, as she calls it," referring to the postscript to *The Rover* where Behn remarks that she has borrowed the "sign of *Angelica*" from *Thomaso*. Though *Thomaso* might have inspired her to produce *The Rover*, her play assumes a completely different character by introducing freshly dramatic persons and plots. Its successful staging is explicit evidence for her ingeniously composing plots or assigning cast; around 1680, she appointed Elizabeth Barry to important parts in her plays and achieved success. Nevertheless, according to Langbaine's account, we "could not justly call these Plays her own." Admittedly, how far the writer can claim the right to the ownership of the work is an issue, especially in cases of adaptation. But, regarding this matter, it is interesting to note another of Langbaine's opinions on *Thomaso*, in which he notes that "the Author has borrow'd several Ornaments" and "has made use of *Ben Johnson* considerably." For all that, "twould certainly be very excusable" because he does "not believe that our Author design'd to conceal his Theft" and "he is not the only Poet that has imp'd his Wings with Mr. *Johnson*'s Feathers" (Langbaine, pp. 313-14). Despite the fact that we could see little distinction between their means of creation, Langbaine openly denies Aphra Behn's authorship, and, on the other hand, professes Killigrew's act of borrowing to be forgivable. However, his standard for judging whether a work is plagiarized or adapted depends on the relationship between its

author and himself, as the case of *Thomaso* is excusable for acknowledging his borrowings from or debt to the greatest comic poet. Even though Langbaine's decision cannot be entirely trustworthy, it certainly shows that Aphra Behn exposed herself to frequent attacks for plagiarizing.

Depending for her living mainly on stage success, she exploited gossip about herself as a prostitute to attract theatergoers. Even an ugly rumor functioned as a useful instrument for theatrical sensation, and yet, what she aimed at was to acquire a reputation as a writer. The publishing current assisted her in this desire by providing the opportunity to proclaim her opinions and view. For instance, when publishing *The Dutch Lover*, presented in 1673, Behn appended a long "Epistle to the Reader," where she blames the play's unpopularity on the unskillful performance and the audience's prejudice against the author, a woman with little education. In response, she states her ideas about plays:

In short, I think a Play the best divertisement that wise men have;
but I do also think them nothing so, who do discourse as formallie
about the rules of it, as if 'twere the grand affair of humane life.
This being my opinion of Plays, I studied only to make this as
entertaining as I could, which whether I have been successful in,
my gentle Reader, you may for your shilling judge.

(*The Dutch Lover*, Epistle, 90-95)

What Behn asserts here is that dramatic works should be enjoyable entertainments and that the readers should judge and find pleasure as they like without being affected by their previous (un)successful performances. This remark does not simply appeal for defense of her work, but clearly indicates that she supposes a plural relation towards the play's texts, that is, those of audience and reader. The readers of dramatic works can be assumed, in a sense, to have appeared during the Interregnum. The ruthless suppression of stage performance by the Commonwealth government deprived playwrights and actors of their living, so that they had to find means of support for themselves; some sold to publishers the dramatic texts owned by their companies; others turned into pamphleteers, bringing dramatic forms into print.¹⁵ As a result, during the period of civil strife, plays or dramatic forms for reading were widely produced, which not only kept alive the plays but shaped their readers as devotees of drama. So, the period of theatrical oppression can be discussed as a period that might have prepared new dramatic foundations for the renewed stage, or new

possibilities that were to flower with the Restoration.

Aphra Behn understood the new theatrical situation in which an audience which was disappointed by a play's performance might enjoy reading the script, or that readers loving the works would come to see them presented on the stage. She cleverly uses the devices newly introduced into the Restoration theatres, such as theatrical machinery, actresses, and the printing system. While she tried to attract more audience to her plays or to improve her status as a writer, she always faced the matter of gender for good or ill. In other words, the real appearance of women on the stage and behind the scenes made the theatrical context of women more complicated. Yet the remarkable fact is that Behn, feeling that her gender produced prejudice, as seen in her *Epistle* or in Langbaine's comments, nevertheless received benefits at fictional and real levels.

V

The theatres in London, entering a new phase in reopening with the Restoration, were searching for ways to gain success in their staging of dramatic performances. Restoration drama is largely divided into two kinds; adaptations from the works of European writers or English authors like Shakespeare, and new plays created by contemporary playwrights. Performing adaptations from Shakespeare would probably have assured favorable receptions, but the right to perform them was controlled or restricted. Therefore, new plays were eagerly sought after, but their presentation was sometimes a very risky gamble for the company. Though accepting occasionally the patronage of the court or city, the company was frequently troubled in its management depending on performance records, so that the failure of a performance could be its deathblow.

In such a context, Aphra Behn, under the pressure of necessity, had to produce plays attractive enough to gain satisfactory profits. During her theatrical career, it is true that she was often regarded critically as a writer of adaptations with few original works, but her adaptations change more than enough to be called "original," because they bear only a slight resemblance to the original works. Furthermore, the fact that she does not select original plays because they were popular is supported by the cases of *Thomaso* and *The Rump*. Rather, she chooses the plays out of her own concerns or intentions: The original strife in politics enables her to represent conflicts between lovers with

political implications, or to put a number of actresses on the stage for visual effect. That is to say, she reproduces love comedies in a time of social, political, and religious instability, by utilizing prototype ideas and forms.

The desire for successful performance may have led her to create a play fundamentally in favor of the courtiers, powerful patrons of the theatre, but she, on several occasions, expresses disapproval of them in their politically or religiously blind enthusiasm or privileged control. In rewriting political plays into Restoration comedies, with actresses assigned to newly created characters like a courtesan struggling for love, political matters, in her hands, could be changed into gender issues arousing the audience's curiosity. Meanwhile, printed scripts had gradually gained a readership since the Civil War, and been read in private with imagination. The growth of this second medium allowed Behn to make good use of printing for her status as a writer. In this way, by using both the strategies of performance and printing, Aphra Behn fashions herself as a writer. In addition, her plays' popularity into the eighteenth century contributed to her being recognized as the first professional English woman playwright. However, the fact that other professional woman playwrights did not appear in the Restoration theatre shows that Aphra Behn established a unique position in the theatrical and social sphere at a time when England was rapidly changing.

Notes

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¹ When Charles II and the courtiers returned to London, they brought the European culture they had acquired in exile to the English theatres; the roofed buildings were furnished with stage settings imported from Europe, which made possible new stage directions, and the Companies engaged, for the first time, professional actresses on the English stage, as many of the European stages had already done. For changes to the theatres before and after the Restoration, see Leslie Hutson 82-132, and Frances Kavenik 1-25. For a study of Restoration actresses, see Elizabeth Howe.

² The change of literary forms has been considered, for example, in terms of inner moral worth, as Colley Cibber's attack on the stage indicates (Laura Brown

185-209), or in the emergence of closet drama (Mary A. Schofield and Cecilia Macheski 355-82).

³ Since the 1990s, Aphra Behn has drawn much attention from literary critics with various viewpoints; in gender studies, she is examined as the first professional woman playwright in England; in respect of international politics or colonialism, she is often connected with her experience of being in Suriname in the 1660s or in Holland on a spying mission during the Second Dutch War. See Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* 35-79. Behn's works are frequently discussed regarding the influence of European culture as well as the earlier English theatrical tradition, because of her adaptations. As for the problem of her adaptations, see Laura Rosenthal 105-61.

⁴ *The Rover* appeared on the stage more than one hundred times for about thirty years from 1714. As for the popularity of this play, see Mary A. Schofield and Cecilia Macheski 325-54, and Frances Kavenik 119-20.

⁵ Killigrew started as Page of Honour to Charles I, following the course of the court, fleeing from the Civil War to Paris to stay with the exiled prince, finally making a journey around Europe. When Charles II was restored to the throne, Killigrew, in the king's favour, was granted various privileges in the theatrical world as well as at court.

⁶ As for Behn's going to Holland as a secret agent during the Second Dutch War, it was Killigrew who presented her with this mission to gather information helpful to the English Army. Back in England, Behn did not receive a reward for her spying mission, probably because her information was useless. She had to ask Killigrew and Charles II to help her from the financial distress that had been caused by her enterprise in Holland, but she was not able to receive their support. What we know is that she was actually put in debtor's prison, while Killigrew, as a king's favorite, lived a luxurious life. When Killigrew was proceeding with *Thomaso*, he married. His marriage was like a play itself, since his bride was an heiress to 10,000 pounds and seventeen years younger than himself. See Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* 80-134.

⁷ At the end of the play, Angelica, to whom *Thomaso* returns her money, so much regrets her involvement in the trick that she is left out of the denouement with remorse about her life. Angelica is often analyzed from sexual or gender viewpoints, in that she herself displays her picture, "a sign of Angelica," in public, commodifying herself as an object of male sexual desire. Aphra Behn's Angelica is represented as a tragic heroine in the first part of *The Rover*. Another Angelica in the second part, La Nuche, is presented more complicatedly, as she discards her professional way of living to live together with the rover, but not to get married.

⁸ In *The Rover*, new main characters appeared; the heroine Hellena, who was acted by Elizabeth Barry initially known as a comedienne; the faithful Belville, who constantly loves the virtuous Florinda, the post-character of Serulina; and a brisk girl Valeria, who forms the third married couple. As a result, the play presents the courses of three couples, including a love triangle between the rover [Willmore], an heiress [Hellena] and a courtesan [Angelica Bianca].

⁹ On English foreign policy, see Steven C. A. Pincus, "Republicanism, absolutism and universal monarchy: English popular sentiment during the third Dutch war" (MacLean 241-66). The politics of Charles, both as an exiled prince and as a king, are described in detail by Hutton.

¹⁰ According to the record for the theatrical season 1680-81 in *A Register of English Theatrical Documents 1660-1737*, the phrase “forbid acting” appears as a “response to their attempt to disguise *Richard the Second* as *The Sicilian Usurper*” (218-22).

¹¹ Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Grafton, was the second son of king’s mistress Lady Castlemaine, later Duchess of Cleveland. He was a young protestant like James Scott, Duke of Monmouth, a most beloved son of the king. This central figure of the Exclusion Crisis, an aspirant to the throne supported by the anti-Catholic party, would be executed after his rebellion in 1685.

¹² Antonia Fraser mentions women’s public activities during the Commonwealth such as “The Ladies Parliament” or “The Commonwealth of Ladies” (222-43).

¹³ See Catherine Gallagher 1-48.

¹⁴ After the Restoration, some of the publishers could make a profit from printing rights mostly registered before 1640 or bought later. These rights were concentrated on a small number of the traders, so many of the publishers began trying to find popular new writers and to print their works. See Feather 50-63.

¹⁵ For the situation of actors or playwrights during Civil Wars and after, see Smith 54-92.

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